

Beautiful Weather – Beautiful Forest – Enjoy Summer Recreation in the Winter Along Highway 20!

With the warm dry weather this year, recreation opportunities abound in the Tahoe National Forest along Highway 20! This is such an unusual year; don't miss the opportunity to get out and about while the days are warm and dry. Hiking, biking, equestrian, and motorcycle trails provide many ways to explore the forest and are within 15 miles of Nevada City. Starting near the Harmony Ridge Market or the Old 5 Mile House Restaurant many trails, trail heads and vista points can be visited as one travels east.

0 mile – Pioneer Trail – Starting point – Set your trip odometer

The Pioneer Trail begins near the Harmony Market across from the Old 5 Mile House Restaurant on Highway 20. The Pioneer Trail was named for the early pioneers that traveled the “Old Emigrant Road” or the “Nevada City Cutoff of the Emigrant Trail” which traversed the ridge. Segments of the historic 1850 trail can be seen as Highway 20 weaves along the old deeply etched wagon road. The modern day system is popular with horseback riders, mountain bikers, and hikers and extends to the east for over 25 miles tying into the Spaulding Lake Trail near the Bowman Road. It is not just one trail, but a system of trail segments that follow the highway as well as others that meander across the ridge. This is a great time of year to get to know these trails, as they are not hot and dusty like they can be in the summer.

2.6 miles farther east – Forest Conservation Road and Gold Country Equestrian Staging Area

Turn left onto the Forest Conservation Road and then left again onto a short dirt road that will take you into an equestrian staging area that accesses the Lone Grave Trail system and which connects to the Pioneer Trail system. Often at this time of the year, the area is a popular spot for those wanting to snow shoe – but not this year!

6.4 miles east – White Cloud Campground, Forest Service Fire Station, and small parking area

A small parking area for bicyclists riding the Pioneer Trail has been established near the entrance to the campground.

White Cloud was named for the clouds of dust kicked up by pioneer and logging wagons during the dry season. The Deer Creek Sawmill was constructed here in the 1880's and was one of the largest mills on the west coast.



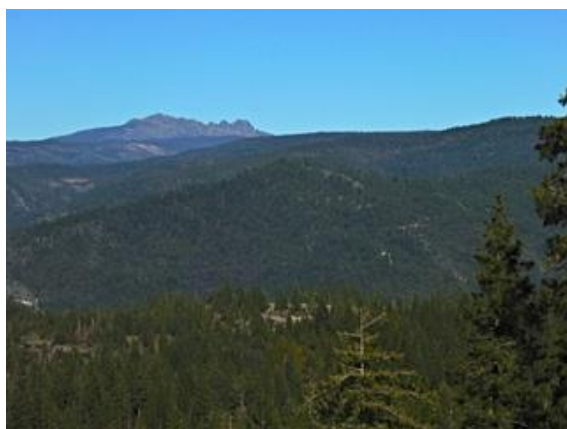
Mountain bikers getting ready for a ride along the Pioneer Trail back to Nevada City

8.3 miles – Overlook Equestrian Staging Area

This staging area on the south side of Highway 20 provides horseback riders and others access to the Hallelujah Trail that extends to the east as well as the Pioneer Trail. In the fall, the area is a blaze of color due to the dense thickets of dogwood. In January, however, the dogwoods are bare. The staging area is located about ½ mile from Highway 20 on a gravel road and is also popular with mountain bikers.

8.4 miles – Washington Overlook Vista Point

On the north side of Highway 20, this overlook provides spectacular views of the ridges between Highway 20 and the Sierra Buttes (8,590 ft) to the north. It also has informative panels that explain the geology, flora and fauna, and National Forest management of the area. This is a great spot to take visitors from out of the area to view the canyons and ridges of Nevada and Sierra Counties. (photo taken Jan 22, 2014 – no snow showing even in the high country.)



9.5 miles – Turn off for Skillman Horse Camp

Although closed at this time of the year, Skillman Campground provides amenities for equestrian campers during the summer. The road also accesses motorcycle trails south of Highway 20.

Skillman Flat was the site of a lumber mill that burned down in 1858.

10.6 miles - Burlington Ridge Access

This area provides some rustic parking to access the many miles of motorcycle trails along the south side of Highway 20. These trails were designed by local motorcycle groups in conjunction with the Forest Service and other trail users to provide technical single track opportunities while minimizing impacts for other users. Trail signs identify the type of use that can occur on these varied trails.



11.8 Miles – Chalk Bluff Road

Turning south onto the Chalk Bluff Road will take you to another staging area for motorcycles to access the Burlington Trail system.

11.9 Miles – Alpha Omega Overlook

This area not only provides a rest area for motorists traveling Highway 20, but also a short paved, interpretive trail leading down to a viewing platform overlooking the South Yuba Canyon. Several signs along the trail highlight forest conditions. Evidence of hydraulic mining from the Alpha and Omega diggins, recent fire scars and the distant mountain peaks are identified on the panoramic sign on the platform. It is well worth a stop to walk out to this scenic vista point. Often in the spring, one can hear the distinctive call of the mountain quail from the viewing platform.

In a normal year, the rest stop is a popular cross country ski area. The ski trails are marked and maintained by the Nevada County Nordic Skiers and extend many miles to the east. This year, however, even at 5,000 feet elevation there was little snow except on north facing slopes or in the shade.

In the 1850's, the Alpha and Omega Diggings were one of the largest hydraulic mine operations in the Sierra. Some of the water from the Yuba River was diverted to the Omega Ditch and into wooden flumes along the granite cliffs above the river for mining purposes.



Viewing Platform over the South Yuba River Canyon



Evidence of hydraulic mining as seen from the viewing platform

Cautions - Highway 20 is a curvy mountain road with intermittent shadows and sun glare due to its forested nature. Please drive with care. When there is snow, the road can be especially slick and dangerous.

Although snow was limited below 5,000 feet, icy conditions were reported on north facing slopes, in drainages, shaded spots, and at upper elevations.

Segments of private land intersperse the National Forest so be sure to respect the rights of the land owners as you travel across private parcels.

Recreation maps of the area can be purchased from the Tahoe National Forest, 631 Coyote St, Nevada City, CA 95959. More information can also be found on their website – www.fs.usda.gov/tahoe or by calling the very helpful folks at the Forest Headquarters – 530-265-4531.